



Mentoring Matters

How do you proceed when you've taken over a new team, only to find a lot of performance issues left behind by the old boss—who is a friend of your new boss? What if your instincts are telling you to take actions that you're worried might offend your new colleagues?

Trevor Lewington is one of three Executive Roundtable members that Founder and President, **Glain Roberts-McCabe** asked to share their strategies with us for taking on performance issues in a new team when it feels like the old manager still in the picture.

“I've just been promoted into a new division and the person who was in that role previously has been promoted up and into a new part of the business. It has become apparent that this previous manager left behind a lot of performance issues within the team and played favourites with certain employees. I feel like I need to do some significant restructuring but I'm concerned that the former manager (who is a good friend of my new boss) will view my actions negatively. Some of the people who I feel are underperforming were the former manager's favourites. How should I handle the changes?”

Trevor Lewington, Chief Executive Officer for Economic Development Lethbridge, provides actionable advice to find out if it's just a few people poisoning the whole team, and if so, how to pinpoint those individuals so you can start managing your team's performance issues and maybe even help those underperformers get back on track.

You can still pull the weeds without leveling the garden.

Former GE Chairman and CEO Jack Welch is known for describing his role as one of a gardener. In his words, "My main job was developing talent. I was a gardener providing water and other nourishment to our top 750 people. Of course, I had to pull out some weeds, too." We, too, as leaders must confront the harsh reality that performance problems, like weeds in a garden, can grow and choke out results from the rest of the team. That said, we must also be cognizant of the political landscape in this scenario. No need to risk being perceived as spraying herbicide on the whole workforce when a few surgical treatments may be all that's needed to allow the team to flourish and bloom.

Arrange time with the former division manager to ask for their assessment of individual performance. You may be surprised to find out that the previous leader had many of the same concerns as you but was unable to address or correct the performance issues. Consider that the underperformers you believe were the former manager's favorites may not necessarily be so. Seek out what development plans may have been in place and work to gain an understanding of any concerns that the former manager had about the team. Ask a lot of open ended questions and listen. Let the former manager do the talking and be careful not to put forward your perceptions until you are clear on where they stand. By engaging the friend of your new boss in the restructuring process you can potentially work to enroll them in your restructuring efforts.

The next step is to engage your new boss in the process. Since you are new to the team, ask for your boss' perspective on individual and team performance. Even if you do not agree with the boss' assessment, you will gain insights as to how your team is viewed and of potential landmines. You will get a sense of whether the boss is open to talking about performance issues within your unit and what bias, if any, actually exists toward the former manager of the division. Outline your thoughts for potential changes and gain feedback on concerns or issues that your boss may have. It is highly

like that a savvy boss will already be aware of the performance issues within your division and might just be waiting for you to step up and take action to drive improved results.

Once you've finished your investigation, tackle the tough issues with your team. The responsibility to manage performance within your division ultimately rests with you, and it's up to you to provide balanced feedback to you team that remembers to highlight successes and strengths, as well as the problem areas. Use objective measures or relevant benchmarks to point out areas of concern with results and performance. Ask underperformers to provide a time-bound game plan to turn things around. Are they even aware there is an issue? By letting your team know that you are serious about results and will be tackling the tough issues, you may find that some underperformers simply self-select and head for the exit. Others may have legitimate barriers that have been holding them back that you can help remove.



Economic Development
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Trevor Lewington is the Chief Executive Officer for Economic Development Lethbridge. Trevor is proud to work with a talented team that develops and delivers on initiatives to promote Lethbridge, Alberta as an excellent place to live, work, visit, invest and do business. Trevor holds a Bachelor of Commerce with a major in Human Resource Management, completed a Change Leadership Certificate with Cornell University and is a Certified Human Resources Professional through the Human Resources Institute of Alberta. Trevor is also a Certified Logistics Professional through the Canadian Institute of Traffic and Transportation. With experience in industry, as a small business owner and roles in the public sector, Trevor strives to provide a broad based perspective which will enhance initiatives that drive continued economic growth in southern Alberta.



Glain Roberts-McCabe is passionate about the art of leadership and supporting ambitious mid-career leaders. She created **The Executive Roundtable** to provide emerging leaders with the navigational skills, tools and savvy needed to manage increases in scope, pressure and leadership complexity.